Towards a thematic strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste

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PURPOSE : to launch a process of consultation of the Community institutions and of waste management stakeholders to contribute to the development of a comprehensive and consistent policy on waste prevention and recycling. CONTENT : firstly, it should be noted that each EU citizen currently produces an average of 550kg of municipal waste per year. This is far beyond the target of 330 kg set down in the EU's 1993 Fifth Environment Action Programme. The amount of waste constitutes a major waste management problem and has significant environmental impact. The Communication on waste prevention and recycling launches a broad consultation exercise on how to avoid generating waste, how to reduce the use of resources, and which wastes to recycle. This Communication is a first contribution to the development of a thematic strategy that will cover both waste prevention and recycling. It is the starting point of a consultation process which will continue until the Commission adopts proposals both for the overall framework of the thematic strategy and for the individual measures through which the strategy will be implemented. This Communication has been inspired by a life-cycle approach to resources management and takes the waste phase as its starting point. Indeed, waste prevention and recycling can reduce the environmental impact of resource use in two ways: avoiding negative environmental impacts from the extraction of primary raw materials and from the transformation of primary raw materials in production processes. Waste prevention and recycling should also be seen as part of a broader waste management strategy. The challenge for policy makers is to find the optimal recycling rate and the best combination of different approaches. Additionally, the focus on environmental benefits achievable through waste prevention and recycling at upstream phases of the life-cycle of resources must be complemented by reducing environmental impacts at the waste management phase including in waste recycling. In relation to waste prevention, the objective of this Communication is to launch, for the first time, a consultation process leading to the development of a comprehensive strategy, including waste prevention targets and the instruments needed to achieve them. The communication invites a very broad discussion, including on: - identifying potentials for waste prevention; - exchange of good practices and experience with a view to defining how the EU may contribute to these; - the role of the future chemicals policy as regards qualitative prevention of waste; - exploring how voluntary or mandatory waste prevention plans could contribute to waste prevention; - assessing the waste prevention potential of the directive on Integrated Pollution prevention and Control (IPPC). For waste recycling, this Communication invites comments on options to promote recycling, including on: - the development of material based recycling targets in articulation with end-of-life products based targets; - getting the prices of the different waste treatment options right by using economic instruments, which could include tradable certificates, the co-ordination of national landfill taxes,promoting pay-as-you-throw schemes and making producers responsible for recycling; - ensuring recycling is both easy and clean. In some cases, implementation of EU waste law may have led to unnecessary burdens on the recycling industry. Such problems need to be identified and solved. Additionally, common approaches for recycling could ensure that recycling businesses apply the best available technology. The European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and all stakeholders are invited to provide comments on this Communication by 30 November 2003. The final Strategy will be produced in 2004.